

The Bronze Bell

By Louis Joseph Vance



hoofs as the animal was checked abruptly in mid-stride was followed by a clamour of drunken cries, shrieks of alarm, and protests on the part of the sepoys disturbed in the midst of their carouse. Over all this there rang the voice of an Englishman swearing good, round, honest British oaths.

"Stand aside, you hounds!" Amber turned pale. "That's Farrell's voice!" he cried, guessing at the truth.

Labertouche made no answer, but edged toward the khansamah's quarters.

The din subsided as Farrell gained the veranda. His feet rang heavily on the boards, and a second later he thrust the door violently open and slammed breathlessly into the room, booted, spurred, his keen old face livid, a riding whip dangling from one wrist, a revolver in the other hand.

He wheeled on the threshold and lifted his weapon, then, with a gasp of amazement, dropped it. "By heaven, sir!" he cried, "that's odd! Those damned sepoys tried to prevent my seeing you and now they've cleared out, every mother's son of them!"

Amber stepped to his side; to his own bewilderment, the compound was deserted; there was not a sepoy in sight.

"So much the better," he said, quickly, the first to recover. "What's wrong, sir?"

"Wrong!" Farrell stumbled over to the table and into a chair, panting. "Everything's wrong! What's gone wrong with you, that we haven't been able to find you all day?"

"I've been lying there," Amber told him, nodding to the charpoy, "drugged. What's happened? Is Miss Farrell—"

"Sophia!" The Political lifted his hand to his eyes and let it fall, with an effect of confusion. "In the name of charity tell me you know where she is!"

"You don't mean—"

"She's gone, Amber—gone. She's disappeared, vanished, been spirited away! Don't you understand me? She's been kidnapped!"

In dumb torment, Amber heard a swift, sharp line of breath as pregnant with meaning as a spoken word, and turned to meet Labertouche's eyes, and to see that the same thought was in both their minds. Slight Singh had found the way to lure Amber to Kathiapur.

No spoken word was needed; their understanding was implicit on the instant. Indeed, the secret agent dared not speak, lest he be overheard by an eavesdropper and so be the cause of his own betrayal. With a flutter of white garments he slipped unobtrusively from the room, and Amber knew instinctively that if they were to meet again that night it would be upon the farther side of the Gateway of Swords.

For himself, his path of duty lay clear to the Virginian's vision; like Labertouche's, it was the road to Kathiapur. He had no more doubt that Sophia had been conveyed thither than he had of Farrell's presence before him.

He thought swiftly of Dulla Dad's parting admonition: "You shall find but one way to Kathiapur."

"Well, sir? Well?" Exasperated by his silence the Political sprang to his feet and brought the riding-crop against his leg with a smack like a gun-shot. "Have you nothing to say? Don't you realize what it means when a white woman disappears in this land of devils? Good God! you stand there, doing nothing, saying nothing, like a man with a heart of stone!"

"Speak French," Amber interposed quietly. He continued in that tongue, his tone so steady and imperative that it brought the half-frantic Englishman to his senses. "Speak French. You must know that we're spied upon every instant; every word we speak is overheard, probably. Tell me what happened—how it happened—and keep cool!"

"You're right; I beg your pardon," Farrell collected himself. "There's little enough to go on. . . . You disappointed us this morning. During the day we got word from a secret but trustworthy source to look out for trouble from the native side. Nevertheless, Rakkes and I were obliged, by reason of our position, representing Government, to attend the banquet in honor of the coronation tomorrow. We called in young Clarkson—the missionary, you know—to stay in the house during our absence. When we returned the Residence was deserted—only we found Clarkson bound, gagged, and nearly dead of suffocation in a closet. He could tell us nothing—had been set upon from behind. Not a servant remained. . . . But, by the way, your man Doggett came in by the evening dak-tonga."

"Where's Rakkes?"

"Gone to the palace to threaten Slight Singh with an army corps."

"You know the telegraph wires are cut?"

"Yes, but how?"

"How? Mind how I know—the story's too long. The thing to do is to get troops here without a day's delay."

"But how?"

"Take Rakkes, Clarkson, and Doggett and ride like hell to Badaah Junction. Telegraph from there. The fear of you ought to be able to fight your way through."

"But, man, my daughter!"

"I know where to find her—or think I do. No matter which, I'll find her."

and bring her back to you safely, or die trying. You spoke just now of a secret but trustworthy source of information: I work with it this night. I can't mention names—you know why; but that source was in this room ten minutes ago. He's gone after your daughter now. I follow. No—I go alone. It's the only way. I know how you feel about it, but believe me, the thing for you to do is to find some way to summon British troops. Now the quicker you go, the quicker I'm off. I can't—daren't move while you're here."

Farrell eyed him strangely. "I'll go," he said after a pause. "But . . . why can't I—"

"There are just two white men living, Colonel Farrell, who can go where I am going to look for your daughter tonight. I'm one of them. The other is—you know who."

"One of us is mad," said Farrell with conviction. "I think you are."

"Or else I know what I'm talking about. In either event you only hinder me now. Please go."

The Virginian followed him to the doorway. Farrell's horse, a docile, well-trained animal, had come to the edge of the veranda to wait for his master. Otherwise the compound was as empty as the night was quiet. Mounting, the Political waved a silent farewell and spurred off toward the city. Amber passed back through the bungalow to the bund.

He lifted his voice and called: "Oho, Dulla Dad!"

There came a soft shuffle of feet on the stones behind him, and the stunted, white-clad figure of Dulla Dad stood at his side, making respectful obeisance. "Huzoor!"

"You damned spying scoundrel!" Amber cried, enraged. "You've been waiting there by the window, listening!"

"Huzoor," the native quavered in fright. "It was cold upon the water and you kept me waiting overlong. I landed, seeking shelter from the wind. If your talk was not for mine ears, remember that you used a tongue I did not know."

"So you were listening!" Amber calmed himself. "Never mind. Where's your boat?"

"I thought to hide it in the reeds. If the huzoor will be patient for a little moment. . . ." The native dropped down from the bund and disappeared into the reedy tangle of the lake shore. A minute or so later Amber saw the boat shoot out from the shore and wing in a long, graceful curve to the steps of the bund.

"Make haste," he ordered, as he jumped in and took his place. "If I have kept you waiting, as you say, then I am late."

"Nay, there is time to spare," Dulla Dad spun the best round and away. "I did but think to anticipate your impatience, knowing that you would assuredly come."

"Ah, you knew that, Dulla Dad? How did you know?"

"I, huzoor? Who am I to know such? . . . Nay, this I have heard"—he paused cunningly:—"You shall find but one way to Kathiapur."

Amber, realizing that he had invited this insolence, was fair enough not to resent it, and held his peace until he could no longer be blind to the fact that the native was shaping a course almost exactly away from the Raj Mahal. "What treachery is this, dog?" he demanded. "This is not the way—"

"Be not mistrustful of your slave, huzoor," whined the native. "I do the bidding of those before whose will I am as a leaf in the wind. It is an order that I land you on the bund of the royal summer pavilion, by the northern shore of the lake. There will you find one waiting for you, my lord."

He landed on the steps of the bund and waited for Dulla Dad to join him; but when, hearing a splash of the paddle, he looked round, it was to find that the native had already put a considerable distance between himself and the shore. Amber called after him angrily, and Dulla Dad rested upon his paddle.

"Nay, heaven-born!" he replied. "Here doth my responsibility end. Another will presently appear to be your guide. Go you up to the jungle path leading from the bund."

The Virginian lifted his shoulders indifferently, and ascended to discover a wide footpath running inland between dark walls of shrubbery, but quite deserted. He stopped with a whistle of vexation, peering to right and left. "What the deuce!" he said aloud. "Is this another of their confounded tricks?"

A low and unobtrusively sweet laugh squandered of his elbow, and he turned with a start and a flutter of his palms. "Huzoor!" he cried.

"Tell me not thou art disappointed, O my king!" she said, placing a soft hand firmly upon his arm. "Dilett thou hope to meet another here?"

"Nay, how should I expect that?" His voice was gentle though he stooped his head against her frustration: for now he had no use for her. "Had Dulla Dad conveyed me to the palace, then I should have remembered thy promise to ride with me to Kathiapur. But, being brought to this place—"

"Then thou didst wish to ride with me?" She nodded approval and understanding. "That is altogether as I would have it. I, too, am bound to the city."

lays I proved thee, for thou hast concealed to approach the Gateway, not altogether because the 'Yezes' both summoned thee, but because, I think, because thine own heart urged thee. Nay, but tell me, King of my Soul, did it not leap a little at the thought of meeting me?"

With a quick gesture she threw her veil aside and lifted her incomparably fair face to his, and he was conscious that he trembled a little, and that his voice shook as he answered overtruly: "Thou shouldst know, Ranae."

"Thou wilt not draw back in the end?" Her arms slipped him softly about the neck and drew his head down so that her breath was fragrant in his ear, her lips a sweet part of herself. "Thou wilt leave whatever may be prepared for thy leaving, for the sake of Ranae, who gives thee beyond the Gateway. O my beloved?"

"I shall not be found wanting," he said, and she slipped from his arms.

his arm. "Nay, I trust thee not!" she laughed, a quiver of tenderness in her merriment. "Let my lips be mine alone until thou hast proven thyself worthy of them." She raised her voice, calling: "Oho, Ranae! Sing!"

The gay rang bell-clear in the distance, and its silvery echo had not died before it was answered by one who stepped out of the black shadow of a spreading banyan, some distance away, and came toward them, leading three horses. As the moonlight fell upon him, Amber recognized the uniform the man wore as that of the Imperial



Came Toward Them Leading Three Horses.

household guard of Khandawar, while the horses seemed to be stallions he had seen in the palace yard, with another but little their inferior in mettle or beauty.

"Now," announced the woman in tones of deep contentment, "we will ride!"

She turned to Amber, who took her up in his arms and set her in the saddle of one of the stallions.

The woman surrendered to Amber the reins of the other stallion and stepped lightly aside. The Virginian took the saddle with a spring leap, and a thought later was digging his heels into the brute's sleek flanks andaving on the bit, while the path bowed beneath him, dappled with moonlight and shadow, like a ribbon of gray-green silk, and trees and shrubbery stretched back on either hand in a rush of molting blacks and grays.

Swerving acutely, the path ran into the dusty high road. Amber heard a rush of hoofs behind him, and then slowly the gauze-wrapped figure of the queen drew alongside.

"Haro! Let him run, my king! The way is not far for such as he. Have no fear lest he tire!"

But Amber set his teeth and wrought with the reins until his mount comprehended the fact that he had met a master and, moderating his first furious burst of speed, settled down into a league-deavouring stride, crest low, limbs gathering and stretching, with the elegant precision of clockwork. His rider, regaining his poise, found time to look about him and began to enjoy, for all his cares, this wild race through the blue-white night.

They circled finally a great, round, grassless hillside, and pulled rein in the notch of a gigantic V formed by two long, pre-ice spurs running out upon a plain whose sole, vague boundary was the vast arc of the horizon.

Before them loomed dead Kathiapur, an island of stone girdled by the shallow silver river. Like the rugged pedestal of some mammoth column, its cliffs rose sheer three-score feet from the water's edge to the foot of the overmaster of its triple walls. From the notch in the hills a great stone causeway climbed with a long and easy grade to the level of the first great gate, spanning the chasm over the river by means of a crazy wooden bridge.

A gasp from the woman and an oath from the sear startled Amber out of somber apprehensions into which he had been plunged by contemplation of this impregnable fortress of desolation. Gaze was his last for port, gone his high, headlong joy of adventure, gone the intoxication which had been his who had drunk deep of the cup of romance. There remained only the knowledge that he, slight and single-minded, was to sit his horse against the terrible and mighty forces that lurked in hiding within these walls, to summon to combat to their designs and so find his way to the woman of his love, tear her from the grasp of the monster, and with her escape.

Hardened had, indeed, he been to any deed or clutch his hand in order to apprehend that the fire was vain. No, he had seen it burn forth, a fire of courage and of love, and he had seen the dark hand of the evil

Additional Local News.

Mrs. Temple and two children are paying a visit to her sister in Moberly.

Dr. O. J. Cunningham returned to Kansas City Friday, after a business trip of several days.

Foreman Smith of the Courier, wife, and two jolly boys were Salisbury visitors last Sunday.

Alfred Burns, a well known attorney of Brookfield, was in town Friday transacting legal business.

Jim McGowan, for the first time in 42 years, was in Keytesville last Friday. He used to drive an ox team from Brunswick to the northern towns in the state, delivering goods.

The many friends of N. O. Tate will be pleased to learn that he has abandoned the practice of "divine teaching" and is now prospering in the real estate business in Nebraska. We learn from a reliable source that his children have all married well, and that he is the same old hustler and handier of farms.

There is one medicine every family should be provided with and especially during the summer months; viz, Chamberlain's Colic, Cholera and Diarrhoea Remedy. It is almost certain to be needed. It costs but a quarter. Can you afford to be without it? For sale by all dealers.

One man was killed and two injured in a wreck of a Frisco freight train near McBride, Mo., Tuesday morning. A tramp was caught in the wreckage and burned to death. Another man stealing a ride was caught under the burning wreckage and in order to save his life, trainmen had to cut his limbs off with an ax before they could extricate him. Twenty spans of the trestle and seventeen cars loaded with merchandis burned.

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Real Estate Transfers.

QUIT-CLAIM DEEDS.

Charles Riffin and wife to William Small, an undivided int., in w hf se 19-54 20—\$1.

A. S. Taylor and wife to E. B. Kellogg, an undivided one-half int., sw se 17, and w hf ne 20 54-18—\$1.

Michael Steffes and wife by trustee, to Herman Range, 5 acres se cor se 15-56-17, described by metes and bounds—(Consideration not mentioned.)

WARRANTY DEEDS.

Edwin D. Agee and wife to Sumie Agee, an undivided one-half int., e hf ne 24-53-18—\$1.

E. J. Hayes and wife to Roy McKittrick, lot 5 in blk 44 in Salisbury—\$1.

Roy McKittrick to Ednah L. Hayes, lot 5 in blk 44 in Salisbury—\$1.

Michael Steffes and wife to Martin Spieler, 5 acres se cor se 15 56 17, by metes and bounds—\$1,000.

Edd Mortimeyer and wife to Anna E. Hunt, 60 feet off west side of blk 56 in Brunswick—\$975.

Caroline Kuhlman to Geo. G. Grofjan, a 66 acres off the w 130 acres of the sw 23-53-19—\$5,500.

C. E. Bonsteel, by trustee, to Joe W. Ingram, blk 5, and lots 5, 6, 7 and 8 in blk 2 in Haryford's addition in Salisbury—\$4,400.

John N. Cooper and wife, by trustee, to William Hammoek, 160 acres off south side ne and 20 acres off a side n hf sw 30 54 17—\$43,350.

John E. Barlow and wife to A. T. & S. F. Railroad Co., ne 2-55 30, described by metes and bounds—\$97 00.

GET READY

COME to Keytesville to do your celebrating

July 4th.

LAST 4th everybody was entertained. This year the program will be better. Come prepared to stay till midnight. Something doing from 9 a. m. to 11 p. m. Look out for the program in the COURIER. If you don't take it subscribe at once or borrow your neighbor's. It will keep you posted on all important matters but particularly on what's in the air for the

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